

Getting an “A” in Assessments

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It's the first day of class. You are reviewing the addendum, guiding your students through Blackboard, discussing the assignments – and the first question you receive is, “But what do I have to do to get an A in this class?” Often, students are focused on the result and not the journey; this is somewhat understandable, as an “A” is of course a primary measurement to confirm completion. However, it is of equal importance to inform students about the value of each individual course assessment as a tool to measure progress and demonstrate their skills as they work towards their career goals. In other words, it's not about the destination (or an “A”), but rather the journey to get there and the lessons along the way.

There are many ways to assess a student's progress, such as including more traditional summative assessments like an exam or major essay. In fact, for students with aspirations to pursue post-graduate education such as a masters or doctorate, such assessments may be of great value to further develop transferrable skills in essay writing or research methods. However, as we continue to instruct in virtual classrooms, the introduction of other assessment methods can enhance the experience for all parties involved.

Formative Assessment

In the absence of body language (e.g., nods, smiles) or informal in-person meetings with our students to check in, how do faculty know our students are engaged and understanding the material in a virtual model? As faculty, we have all had **that** moment. We ask ourselves: are they understanding the lessons? Are they ready to complete the course? Formative assessments are a useful and powerful resource to proactively manage such concerns. A formative assessment can be something as simple as a wrap-up activity, such as asking students to share one thing they learned today. Introducing these activities will empower you to further support your students. Did they “get it”? The findings of a formative assessment will help you determine what topics you may need to revisit to support student progress as

they move towards completing the summative assessments (those assessments which are graded and request the student to demonstrate knowledge in direct relation to learning outcomes).

As we continue to develop expertise in a virtual classroom, the million-dollar question many of us have been asking is **how** do I create a classroom culture remotely? Without the opportunity for spontaneous giggles or those magical “ah-ha” moments shared between team members, how do we create connections between strangers? How are these connections organically formed in a digital space? Interestingly, with the strategic diversification of assessments and the introduction of meta-cognitive assessments, relationships can be formed and flourish. How so?

Meta-cognitive assessments are independent of the professor’s direct involvement. Instead, they are guided by sharing reflections through self or peer evaluations. To ensure consistency, specific assignment briefs and rubrics provided by the professor map the completion of such assessments. The feedback from meta-cognitive assessments supports individual student learning and encourages the expansion of understanding through immediate measurement. Such feedback can also be very empowering to students. For example, if a student is scared to present in front of a group, a monitored meta-cognitive assessment can also become an amazing tool of encouragement for that student once they receive positive peer evaluations. A word to the wise, however; it is important to monitor such assessments in some form to ensure the peer evaluation is respectful and appropriate. Advising the students of your expectations, and transparently communicating that you will read the comments prior to sharing this with the evaluated student, will strengthen the participation of everyone involved.

Authentic Assessment

Authentic assessments introduce a valuable industry perspective in a virtual classroom

As the saying goes, variety is the spice of life! This saying also holds true for assessments. Working in a global classroom, many students bring a variety of strengths to each session. Equally, the variation in talents also relates to the ability for each student to demonstrate their knowledge in regards to the learning outcomes. Returning to the previous example of presentation skills, some students may feel they can articulate their knowledge in an oral presentation or video better than a written document. Conversely, other students prefer time to reflect and write their answers in a documented format. Therefore, diversification of assessments throughout the course is imperative. In addition to traditional summative assessments such as a test or quiz, authentic assessments introduce a unique method to diversify the manner to review student progress. In essence, an authentic assessment is a

deliverable that directly reflects the skills required in industry.

An authentic assessment supports student progress in relation to the learning outcomes, in addition to developing student knowledge of industry skills. Introducing authentic assessments both diversifies how student progress is measured and increases their confidence to produce industry-related materials, such as an image as a graphic designer, a financial report for a business student, or a strategic plan for a future communications professional. Authentic assessments also become an incredible portfolio piece for the student to post via LinkedIn or to share in a job interview.

Assessment Design

And finally, regardless of the type of assessment, how do faculty earn an “A” in assessment design?

- Clearly communicate expectations
- Map the learning outcomes to the assessments
- Map the lessons to guide the development of necessary knowledge and skills to complete the assessments
- Plan the timing of assessments so they are both manageable for student completion, as well as allow faculty the necessary time to review and provide quality feedback

Most importantly, reflect throughout the semester and do not be afraid to ask yourself if the assessment was received well by the students. Thinking ahead towards the end of term, consideration of student feedback will also enhance the future delivery of your assessments. Confidently assessing your assessments will result in an A+ for your unique and effective course design.



Save the date: the next Teaching & Learning Day will be on **Monday, October 26, 2020** (during Study Week). The focus of this virtual conference will be on **Assessment Strategies**.



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